United Nations A/58/PV.17

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

17th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 30 September 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Address by Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rakhmonov (*spoke in Russian*): Exactly 10 years ago today, the Head of Tajikistan addressed world leaders for the first time from the high rostrum of the General Assembly. At that moment, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, our country was taking its first steps as an equal member of the community of nations.

The establishment of Tajikistan as a modern, democratic, secular State coincided with the emergence of the need to search for our own ways of interacting efficiently in a rapidly changing world. Against the background of the inter-Tajik conflict, we had but little time to find effective methods of dealing with the huge political, social and economic problems of the transitional period.

Today, full of pride in the peace-loving, industrious and talented people of Tajikistan, I am able report to the representatives of the world's countries that we have emerged with dignity from the toughest trial that has ever befallen our nation. It stands to reason that Tajikistan, its people and its statehood were able to withstand that trial largely thanks to support of the international community. The United States, Russia, China, Japan, India and Iran, the European Union and Central Asia States and many other countries, large and small, supported the young Tajik State during that dramatic period of our history. The United Nations played a special role in this process. Tajikistan greatly appreciates this support, and is striving in turn to be a responsible member of the international community.

A decade may not be sufficient time to take full stock of progress made on an international or national scale. However, trying to understand the lessons of the multifaceted and dramatic events at the turn of this century could be very useful to our common quest to make lasting improvements to the world order.

For Tajikistan, the main lesson to be drawn is clear: the future lies with democracy within sovereign State borders and with the democratization of international political and economic relations. The lesson to be drawn is that establishing a democratic society is in many ways the same for all countries, but each case is also unique. Our own experience has shown that today there are no countries or peoples unwilling to accept democracy or unprepared for it.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

03-53549 (E)

The peoples of Asia cherish the same values as the peoples of Europe, America or Africa.

It is also obvious that specific conditions, and each nation's historical heritage and cultural traditions, clearly influence the pace and form of the democratic processes in each country. This issue was thoroughly discussed at the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies that was recently held in Mongolia. We believe that its outcome will give a fresh impetus to democratic processes everywhere, including Asia.

Establishing a democracy should not be considered as being easy to achieve, but rather as an extremely complex step-by-step process. In this sense, the experience of developed democracies is indeed invaluable. Nevertheless, even they are still struggling to strike an optimal balance between the interests of the State and the individual and resolve the question of how to meet the basic needs of their citizens while respecting the primacy of the right to private property in a market economy.

The people of Tajikistan won their independence and democracy through enormous suffering and hardship. Peace prevailed in our country only when we recognized that national accord should prevail over political ambitions and military confrontation, as the highest goal of society, united not only by common efforts to survive but also by a strong faith in its creative capacity.

The brightest prospects for Tajikistan lie in a vision of a future developed democracy and prospering secular State, bolstered by a strong civil society. During his visit to Tajikistan last year, Mr. Kofi Annan could see the tangible outcome of the United Nations peacekeeping activities and striking change in the mood of the people, who now have hope for the future of their children and their country.

We are convinced that the democratic processes in Tajikistan will gain momentum. We have all the prerequisites for this. The restoration of peace in Tajikistan in 1997 laid a solid foundation for a secular democratic State. The constitution was adopted by a national referendum. State bodies of authority have been performing efficiently at all levels, reflecting the entire spectrum of the extensive political life of the country.

This does not imply that nothing threatens our young democracy, or that it is invulnerable. As a President who knows the needs and problems of the people who have entrusted me with such a high office, I will be sincere and share some of my thoughts. These concern both domestic and international affairs, including relations with the United Nations.

First of all, we have no right to discredit the idea of democracy itself, in which Tajik society continues to place its hopes for a better life. However, experience has shown that there are no simple recipes for converting the political process into economic development. Moreover, Tajikistan's experience compellingly demonstrates the need for comprehensive post-conflict rehabilitation. Enhancing the practical benefits of such efforts must be a priority for the United Nations system and the international community. Conflict zones must be transformed into areas of stability, and serve as examples to help to prevent new tragedies.

Donors must make pledges that are responsible, and do not merely raise hopes. The central coordinating role in this respect undeniably falls to the United Nations. We are deeply grateful to the numerous friends of Tajikistan, including international financial institutions, for their support. We attach special importance to our cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies. We believe that the United Nations Tajikistan Office of Peace-building is doing useful work to enable the international community to better grasp the positive changes in our country and its interests and needs.

Now that Tajikistan has reached a new stage of development, we especially appreciate the assistance to achieve our priority goals. Today, as never before, Tajikistan needs assistance and practical support for effectively tapping our rich human and natural resources. We are resolved to making our economy up to date and competitive, inter alia, in order to overcome poverty once and for all.

I must note with regret that despite the many gains in international affairs these past years, the international community has still not managed to truly resolve the problem of poverty. Though the item has been discussed at many conferences and forums, no specific actions towards eliminating poverty have resulted. The growing gap between the rich and poor countries is becoming a global challenge and threatens

to emerge as the main obstacle to the harmonious development of both individual countries and the community of nations as a whole.

Of course, we must bear the primary burden of addressing social and economic problems. However, developing countries are justified in their expectations for alleviation of the external difficulties encountered in integrating into the world economy, which, in our case, is connected to access to investment, markets and high technologies. Equally pressing for us are the problems of landlocked countries that have long been discussed at international conferences, particularly closed borders and the many barriers to the free exchange of goods, services, capital and labour.

I would like to draw attention to another such issue: the problem of freshwater. We are glad that Tajikistan's proposal to proclaim 2003 the International Year of Freshwater was enthusiastically supported by the international community. Experience has shown that it was a very timely decision that met the expectations of us all. The shortage of freshwater is one of the most urgent concerns of the new millennium. Every year the demand for water increases because of the need to produce sufficient food — and I can provide statistics in support of that assertion. Some 1.2 billion people have no access to freshwater. More than 5 million people die every year from water-related diseases. According to estimates of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, meeting the food needs of the growing global population will require a 60 per cent increase in food production over the next 30 years. By 2030, one out of every five developing countries will be experiencing enormous difficulties because of current and future water shortages.

A significant investment must be made in updating technology and improving water resource management so as to support economic growth and lessen the burden of poverty.

Guided by the Water Appeal, which was adopted on 1 September 2003 by the participants of the International Freshwater Forum in Dushanbe, I propose that the period 2005-2015 be proclaimed the International Decade of Freshwater.

The adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution on this important matter would mean the logical extension of the idea of the International Year of Freshwater. It would also be in keeping with the provisions of the Millennium Declaration, which set the goal of halving, by 2015, the number of people who lack access to freshwater and sanitation.

The International Decade of Freshwater would allow the international community to continue its focus on the issue of the shortage of water. Water, the common heritage of humankind, is vital for the preservation of life on Earth and essential for ensuring sustainable development.

It is well known that terrorism poses a threat to democracy. Tajikistan has had first-hand experience of this problem, as for 10 years we have been a kind of buffer zone against the expansion of terror in Central Asia and other countries. Precisely for that reason, Tajikistan has taken an active part in all efforts to root out that evil.

We are equally resolute in our condemnation of and desire to counteract all forms of terrorism. In this struggle, which we can win only through united efforts, there can be no selectivity or double standards. It is clear, however, that terrorism cannot be curbed solely by military methods. It would be equally erroneous to believe that the phenomenon is rooted in a single religion or culture. The rejection of democracy is not the only source of terrorism; terrorism also takes advantage of injustice and suffering, of the arrogance of some and the sense of humiliation felt by others.

Terrorism shows up in places where one "absolute truth" is confronted by another. Although terrorism has nothing to do with the conflict of civilizations, the extension of the dialogue among civilizations that was begun by the General Assembly in 1998 can contribute to better mutual understanding — the lack of which is quite evident.

Dialogue is always more constructive than war. Dialogue conducted in all areas will liberate international relations from fear and mistrust and will make international cooperation constructive and creative.

Our consolidated efforts have dealt a severe blow to terrorism as an organized phenomenon, but such efforts have not yet defeated it. One of the lessons learned in the course of this struggle — a struggle in which Tajikistan is an active participant — is that international terrorism has no ideology, nation or homeland. Furthermore, terrorism cannot exist without financial and logistical support. In this context, we should note that democracy is threatened by another

phenomenon that is no less frightening — that of drug aggression.

The illicit trade in drugs has become one of the major sources of financing for international terrorism. The urgency and magnitude of the problems related to the illicit drug trafficking provide clear proof that this is a global menace that endangers international stability and security as a whole.

Tajikistan has an extensive border with Afghanistan, and finds itself in a position between the world's major producer of opium and heroin and the drug-consuming countries, to which international organized crime is smuggling the "white death".

As President of Tajikistan, I consider the need to curb drug trafficking through my country to be one of our nation's top priorities. During his visit to Tajikistan last year, the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, had the opportunity to observe the great professional skill and dedication of the staff of the Agency for Drug Control that has been established there with the support of the international community.

According to United Nations data, Tajikistan is ranked fourth in the world and first in the Commonwealth of Independent States in terms of the quantity of drugs withdrawn from trade. As a result of our efforts in the past four years, more than $1 billion worth of opiates has been confiscated from drug dealers.

The struggle against such narcotic aggression, which generates multibillion dollar profits in countries located far from Tajikistan, will be successful only through the consolidation of collective efforts.

Given the increased drug threat, and in order to expand multilateral cooperation in combating it, Tajikistan proposes the establishment of a global partnership to counteract the drug threat. Such a unique, broad anti-drug coalition could become a reliable barrier to the expansion of this scourge.

The Secretary-General could become coordinator of such a partnership, and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention could become its central executive body. Such a global partnership would coordinate all efforts in the field at all levels, including the regional level.

I would like to take this opportunity to draw the attention of Members to another issue that is cause for concern. Certain groups of people have been using the global communications media recently in an attempt to equate such grave threats to humankind as terrorism and extremism with the holy religion of Islam. Such an interpretation represents a distortion of the peaceful essence of Islam and presents the religion to the international community as a source of evil and violence, thus giving rise to hostility towards the entire Muslim world and encouraging neo-fascist and other discriminatory attitudes.

We would like once again to stress that the acts of terror that are being carried out in a number of countries are crimes, committed by cruel, merciless people who are driven by the lust for power and personal gain - people who have nothing to do with the holy religion of the world's Muslims.

Humanity must understand that Islam is not a religion of violence, but like the world's other religions, calls upon people to show mercy and compassion and appeals for peace and harmony.

Tajikistan supports increased regional cooperation in all areas. Our goal is to create a zone of peace, stability, harmony and prosperity in Central Asia.

Turning Central Asia into a zone free of weapons of mass destruction is a matter of principle for Tajikistan, and that is why my country endorsed the idea of establishing a nuclear weapon-free zone in the region

Meanwhile, I would like to join the common concern about increased difficulties related to the non-proliferation of these types of weapon in the world, including South Asia. I am convinced that the time has come not to weaken, but rather to intensify, collective efforts and expand disarmament mechanisms.

Another issue has become a challenge of the twenty-first century — the increasing number of territories aspiring to the status of State but not recognized as such by the international community. Those territories become criminalized from within, establish external ties that are not quite legal and become catalysts for regional conflicts.

For that reason, it is in the interest of the international community to start, in the short term, to develop universal criteria for international recognition of States. By doing so, it would be possible to prevent the provocation of separatist sentiments in certain

regions that are fraught with negative consequences for the destinies of many peoples and States.

Tajikistan notes with satisfaction the considerable progress in the revival of Afghanistan. We are enthusiastic about how the international community is resolute in its support for processes of national accord and peace-building in our neighbouring country. Tajikistan is deeply aware of the need to render international support to Afghanistan, and it will increase its assistance to the efforts undertaken by the Afghanistan Government headed by Mr. Hamid Karzai.

Meanwhile, we are persistent in calling on the international community not to lessen its attention to the needs of that country, to renew its vigorous commitment to rendering support for positive change, to give fresh impetus to the peace process, making it irreversible, and to dramatically increase efforts to uproot drug production in Afghanistan.

Given the global danger of the drug problem, I once again call on the international community and relevant international organizations to develop a unified programme of action aimed at eradicating the production, manufacture and dissemination of drugs in that country.

The situation in Iraq continues to be a cause for pain and concern. Conditions there are still far from normal. It is not only a matter of the post-military environment, the lost lives of military personnel, and, even more sadly, of peaceful citizens. It is a matter of the lack of acceptable living conditions for many Iraqi people.

Though positive changes are obvious, restoring Iraq's sovereignty is the greatest priority. We share the majority opinion regarding the fact that the Iraqi people themselves should determine their future and that the international community, embodied by the United Nations, should be called on to render assistance in the implementation of that goal.

Every people follows its own road to democracy. However, only together can we deal with the challenges and the threats we face on this path.

The United Nations remains the ultimate, indeed unique, mechanism for taking collective action to address global issues. The noble goals for human development set out in the Millennium Declaration, which Tajikistan joined in signing, is convincing proof of that. The United Nations has united almost all countries of the world. All of us, the United Nations founding Member States and recently admitted Member States, pledged to observe its Charter. And that is the way it should be.

Our Organization is currently experiencing another test — the search for efficient answers in new circumstances with new requirements for world development. The point is that the Organization and its major bodies should keep up with the processes occurring in a constantly changing world. Though reform of the United Nations is under way, the time has come to channel the practical activities of all its bodies into real priorities.

In the field of international peace and security, the focus should be on the prevention of military conflicts, both intergovernmental and internal.

The General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and all other components of the United Nations system are faced with the need to find convincing answers to the globalization process, in order to bridge the gap between the industrialized and the developing countries.

We expect improved professional skills from Secretariat staff members and increased practical outcome of their work and of the work of all United Nations agencies, for the benefit of all Member States.

The feeling that the United Nations is going through a crisis that materialized at some point is already fading. It is being substituted by an awareness of the need to strengthen the Organization, as well as for collective interaction within its framework. The preservation and the development of the Organization is our common goal, as the international community has no another similar universal mechanism.

The United Nations is the heritage of all humanity. Tajikistan will be resolute in doing everything possible for the successful implementation of the noble mission of the United Nations for the benefit of all mankind.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Tajikistan for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Emomali Rakhmonov, President of the Republic of Tajikistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Simeon de Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Mr. Simeon de Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Simeon de Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (Bulgaria) (*spoke in French*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. This session will be one of the most decisive ones for the United Nations. In that spirit, I welcomed the call of the Secretary-General to heads of State and Government to actively participate in the work of this session.

I have come to New York to solemnly reiterate Bulgaria's steadfast support for the United Nations. Its principles, objectives and the spirit of solidarity that inspires it are at the very core of my country's foreign policy. I should like to pay sincere tribute to the remarkable efforts of the men and women who work for the Organization in every corner of the world. The terrorist attack against the United Nations in Baghdad on 19 August reminded us that nothing that we wish to do through the United Nations would be possible without the self-sacrifice of those people. I take this opportunity to honour the memory of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues, and I express once again the most sincere condolences of the people of Bulgaria to their families.

The barbaric act of 19 August sounded the alarm: terrorism is far from being vanquished; the vigilance of all United Nations Member States must be redoubled and the effectiveness of their efforts tripled. Indeed, the very function of the Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee cannot truly be effective unless it is supported by regional and subregional organizations. It is a question of creating a genuine global anti-terrorist action network in which a high-priority role naturally devolves to the European Union, to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In my view, it is important that all United Nations Member States sign and ratify as soon as possible the 12 Conventions related to the fight against terrorism, as the Republic of Bulgaria has done, without, however, forgetting to address the origin — indeed, the root causes — of these desperate acts.

At the end of this year, Bulgaria will conclude its two-year mandate as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. The conjunction of circumstances caused our Council membership to coincide with a particularly dynamic — indeed, dramatic — phase in international life, during which the very credibility of the United Nations was put to the test. It is obviously too early to draw all the possible conclusions from that experience, but one thing is clear: peace and stability in the world need the United Nations now more than ever before. In other words, there is no alternative to the United Nations.

We note that the credibility of the United Nations, and particularly of the Security Council, have been called into question each time Member States have seen their unity shaken. It is in that spirit that Bulgaria is doing its best to avoid the pitfalls of discord.

We fervently hope that the Council's unity will be restored on the thorny Iraqi issue. The stability and prosperity of Iraq — which is emerging from a ferocious dictatorship — are in the interest of the entire international community. Contributing to the country's stabilization in a concrete way, Bulgaria is working at the diplomatic level to find a formula that will enable the Iraqis to recover their sovereignty as swiftly as possible through a central and important United Nations role in the political process under way in the country.

It is essential that the Council be able to provide the United Nations a clear and realistic mandate that would facilitate the mission of the Secretary-General and his associates in Iraq — a mission that is already extremely complex and perilous. I believe that the provisional Governing Council represents the international community's best partner for helping the Iraqis to rebuild their country. In that context, Bulgaria

hopes to resume its traditional friendly relations with Iraq.

My Government is very concerned as a result of events in the Middle East. The road map elaborated by the Quartet remains valid and must be implemented by the parties concerned. The Government of Bulgaria reiterates its appeal to the Palestinian Authority to fully meet its obligations under the road map to stop suicide attacks against civilians. We call on the Israeli Government to stop extrajudicial executions and to renounce its plans to expel President Yasser Arafat.

Although South-Eastern Europe is experiencing a period of peace, accelerated development and better prospects for integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, there are still points of tension that cannot be ignored. Obviously, I am thinking of the situation in Kosovo, where the United Nations is playing an irreplaceable role. Bulgaria hopes for a multi-ethnic, democratic and prosperous Kosovo, as envisaged by Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). The recent acts of violence make us think that the enemies of that particular Kosovo have not given up. I should like to take this opportunity to emphasize the importance that my country attaches to respect for and protection of religious monuments in Kosovo. I can affirm that the solution to the Kosovo problem can be found in dialogue — particularly dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade — that respects the right of all the province's inhabitants to live in peace, whatever their ethnic affiliation.

Two years after having had the opportunity to speak before the General Assembly, I have the privilege to share with Members Bulgaria's significant progress in attaining its principal foreign policy objective: joining the European Union and NATO. In 2004, Bulgaria will become a member of the Atlantic Alliance. We are about to conclude negotiations with the European Union with a view to acceding to it on 1 January 2007. Such progress will enable my country to be even more effective in the implementation of the principles and ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

Beginning 1 January 2004, Bulgaria will assume the chairmanship of the OSCE for one year. The Bulgarian chairmanship of that important regional body will devote priority attention to cooperation with the United Nations. In our view, the experience accumulated by the OSCE with regard to organizing and observing free and democratic elections could be as useful to the United Nations as to other regional forums. The defence and consolidation of human rights are naturally part of our priorities.

It is difficult for me to conclude without mentioning what I believe to be the main thread running through the discourse in this Hall — the future of the United Nations. One thing is certain: at a time of globalization, the sole institution of multilateralism that is universal in nature is in fact irreplaceable. The great issues of the modern world - international peace and security, the fight against poverty and for development, the defence and promotion of human rights, and protection of the environment and of human health — cannot find lasting solutions except through the efforts of, and within the framework of, the United Nations.

It goes without saying that the United Nations can meet these formidable challenges only if it undergoes a profound process of reform. Reform must be undertaken without violating the principles or spirit of the Charter. It must be carried out with determination, but not in haste.

The Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has identified the genuine problems that we, the Member States, must tackle. As always, he has asked the right questions. My Government supports his efforts to assist Member countries in crafting a clear and far-sighted vision of the future of the United Nations, in particular by means of his idea of appointing a group of eminent personalities to provide ideas for such reforms. Bulgaria is ready to participate in that act of collective reflection, which will require both courage and wisdom.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Colombia.

Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Uribe Vélez (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to congratulate you, Sir, upon your election as President of the General Assembly, and to wish you every success in the performance of your duties.

Despite the anxiety that we feel in the face of the terrorism that is affecting so many countries, we reaffirm our commitment to fight that scourge until we have defeated it. Colombia reaffirms its faith in multilateralism as the most effective system through which to seek peace, security and human, economic and social development. The United Nations is irreplaceable, even if, for the good of the humanity, its structure and procedures must be constantly updated so as to increase the efficiency of its anti-terrorism activities.

The United Nations itself recently suffered a terrorist attack, an act that resulted in the death of Sergio Vieira de Mello, a tireless campaigner for the coexistence of peoples. We deeply regret the loss of those who have sacrificed their lives as they worked to put an end to terrorism. Our obligation to reciprocate is all the greater as a result of the solidarity expressed by the United Nations towards Colombia.

A year ago in the General Assembly I set out my democratic security policy, developed to free the Colombian people from terrorism. That policy is designed to protect the rights of all citizens, regardless of their social or economic status, political ideas or religious beliefs. The policy affords equal protection to business and union leaders as well as Government and opposition politicians. It is based on the dream of a pluralist nation that shares in an ongoing constructive debate in a spirit of brotherhood and without hatred.

In an area of Colombia covering almost 1.2 million square kilometres, about 400,000 of them consisting of jungle, terrorists have taken advantage of the absence of a State presence in many places. A year ago, out of a total of 1,100 municipalities, 170 did not have a police presence. That number has been reduced to 151, and we hope to extend coverage to all the municipalities within a few weeks. Hundreds of smaller towns, however, lack a police force. We now have soldiers and marines — known as soldiers of the people — in 439 municipalities, under a programme that allows them to carry out their military service in their home town. The results thus far have been positive, and when the soldiers have completed their active duty, we hope to rely on them as permanent law-enforcement leaders.

Such efforts, together with others that we have undertaken in similar areas, must continue so that the Government can rid the country of terrorism.

I would like to share with the Assembly some of the achievements of my Administration during the first nine months of this year. The murder rate has decreased by 22 per cent when compared with the same period in 2002 — down from 21,253 to 16,531. The total of 1,485 kidnappings represents a reduction of 34.7 per cent over the same period last year; the number of victims of illegal road blocks decreased by 49 per cent, and the number of operations to rescue kidnapped people increased by 22.8 per cent. But what country could accept 1,485 kidnappings in nine months?

The number of massacres and the number of their victims have decreased by 35 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. We will be able to claim victory only when we have completely eliminated these attacks. Every terrorist act brings suffering to the whole nation. FARC carried out the car bombing of the club El Nogal, used a bomb in a boat in the rural town of Puerto Rico and exploded a truck bomb in the small town of Chita. These bombings together killed 47 people and injured 233. And just a few hours ago, in Florencia, another bomb has left 12 dead and wounded 46.

The number of union members assassinated has declined from 120 to 36. Several of those responsible are now in jail, as a result of our determination to fight impunity. Sixty teachers were murdered in 2002. This year, 24 such cases have been reported. The number of journalists murdered has dropped from 9 to 5.

The decrease in overall crime is significant, but the numbers are still staggering. No country could feel safe under such circumstances. I reaffirm our democratic desire to protect, in particular, our teachers, union leaders and journalists.

I acknowledge with great sorrow that the number of indigenous people murdered has increased from 72 to 75. Illegal self-defence groups were responsible for 33 of those cases, with various guerrilla groups being responsible for the remainder.

During the first six months of 2003, 73,586 cases of forced displacement were reported. This represents a decrease of 66 per cent. We are beginning successfully to return families to where they came from. I reaffirm our commitment to fight to protect the indigenous communities and to put an end to forced displacement.

Of the 246 mayors who in August 2002 were in exile from their municipalities as a result of threats, 191 have now returned, thanks to the improved security situation. The progress we have made in regard to the protection of our citizens encourages us to continue making efforts in that direction.

Between 7 August 2002 and 7 August 2003, 2,544 members of illegal self-defence groups were captured, which represents an increase of 146 per cent. The number of those killed in combat by the armed forces has increased by 38.7 per cent, the number of guerrillas captured has increased by 126.3 per cent and the number of those killed in combat has increased by 78 per cent.

Because of my pure democratic conviction, I reaffirm our commitment to human rights. We have extended the stay of the Office of the United Nations Commissioner in Bogota. We agree with many of its recommendations. We have no doubt about seeking their implementation, and we will discuss the cases on which we disagree.

Our requirement for the soldiers and the police is efficiency and respect for human rights. We encourage and care for our armed forces, as we demonstrated recently with the improvement of our social security system. However, we will not hesitate to send to jail those who break the law.

The sacrifice of our soldiers and policemen has been enormous. This year, because of anti-personnel mines alone, 109 soldiers have been killed and 334 have been wounded, many of them mutilated for life.

If we request international support, it is because we are open to international monitoring. We respect the human rights organizations and their workers who proceed seriously and we respect their criticism and constructive suggestions. Those organizations contribute to improving democratic conditions. That is why we agree with the Human Rights Watch report on the recruitment of children by terrorist groups. We reserve the right, however, to disagree with false reports which distort our efforts to consolidate a democratic concept of security.

As the United Nations has acknowledged, we have made substantial progress in destroying illicit drugs. We have eradicated 70 per cent of illicit crops, and we will not stop until we rid our country of that serious scourge. We have authorized the extradition of 94 persons for drug-trafficking crimes.

We have hired 5,400 families as forest rangers, as part of our goal to recruit 50,000 families. They receive economic compensation to replace illicit crops for the purpose of replanting and taking care of the rainforest.

Mr. Da Fonseca (Cape Verde), (Vice-President), took the Chair.

A more effective law designed to confiscate illicit drug wealth has allowed for the increase in the number of rulings in one year from 5 to 68.

In Colombia's current situation, terrorism, illicit drugs, violence and insecurity are really the same thing. We plead for a commitment from the world so that we are able to completely defeat drugs. We implore the world not to harbour our terrorists, to help us confiscate their goods and to open their doors only to help peace processes.

Our country is a State based on law. We want to overcome terrorism and be able to look to the international community with the certainty that we have acted in strict compliance with the law. In order to fight impunity, we have incorporated the accusatory penal system and oral procedure, which will begin in 2005.

At the present time we are introducing a constitutional change to allow the armed forces to proceed with specialized personnel, in cases of terrorism, to carry out raids, conduct property searches and undertake interceptions. Those actions will be conducted with democratic safeguards, allowing for an independent attorney to intervene quickly. The attorney's office and Congress will be informed. The proposed measures are infinitely less rigorous than the current laws of democracies that do not have the high levels of terrorism that we have in Colombia.

This Government found approximately 30,000 people who belong to illegal terrorist organizations, defined in this way because of the nature of their actions. Consideration and reflection on that figure dictates the need to continue with a strong authoritarian policy and of opening avenues for negotiation once hostilities have ceased.

I welcome the efforts made by the Secretary-General this past year to seek paths to peace with the FARC. The Government supports his good offices, which, until now, have been unsuccessful because of the lack of willingness on the part of the terrorists. That group has kidnapped hundreds of Colombians and some foreign citizens, most of whom are kept in concentration camps that recall the Nazi era. I reaffirm to the Secretary-General my commitment to find a solution, to be recommended by him, to free the hostages, under conditions that are in keeping with legal norms and that do not intensify violence.

Since the last Colombian Government, we have sought, through Cuba, on the one hand, and several additional Governments on the other, a peace process with the National Liberation Army (ELN). We have made every effort, which, to date, has been futile. The leaders of that group who are in jail have received the best treatment possible. On 30 June, through a facilitation commission, I offered to examine an ELN prisoner release proposal, in exchange for their renunciation of armed activity and their dedication to help achieve peace. I did not get a positive response, but I will continue to insist on this.

The ELN is holding seven foreign citizens whom it should release, in keeping with its promise to cease its crimes during the current electoral process.

Since the last Government, we have also sought a peace process with the illegal paramilitary groups, with the mediation of the Catholic Church. The condition is the same — the cessation of hostilities. Groups of those organizations, which represent 10,000 or more people, have expressed the willingness to demobilize. The Government is making progress in that process.

During my Administration, 2,250 members of terrorist groups have been demobilized; 70 per cent of them belong to the FARC, 18 per cent to the ELN and 12 per cent to illegal paramilitary groups. To reintegrate members of the various groups into civilian life, Colombia requires a judicial framework that realistically defines how to achieve justice, repair damage to the community and ensure peace. The alternative sentence proposal, submitted by the Government for congressional consideration, sets forth a legal and transparent procedure that will allow for progress towards a negotiated peace solution with the illegal paramilitary groups, the FARC and the ELN.

I understand the concern raised by offering diminished sentences for grave crimes. But, in a context of 30,000 terrorists, it must also be understood that a definitive peace is the best justice for a nation in which several generations have never gone through a single day without experiencing an act of terrorism.

The proposal has prompted national and international controversy. We are looking for the broadest possible consensus. We invite everyone to examine the various options and to achieve, through the process of amendments, the best final text.

We have no doubt about defeating terrorism. However, there are times that call for adjusting the equation between justice and peace in order to reach a consolidated peace.

We agree with what was expressed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has proposed an excellent balance between the need for justice and the need to save innocent lives. To protect our communities, we need to pursue terrorists relentlessly and not miss opportunities to obtain peace agreements with them, provided that, through their actions, they convince the Colombian people and the world of their good faith and their desire for rectification.

Our problem is an international threat. If Colombia does not destroy illegal drugs, illegal drugs will destroy the Amazon Basin. If Colombia does not stop terrorism, it will jeopardize the democracies of the region. The President of Ecuador, Lucio Gutiérrez, and the Rio Group, have understood that. The Rio Group endorsed the proposal that the United Nations continue to make efforts for negotiations with the Colombian terrorists, or, if that is not possible, to seek alternatives to overcome the problem.

Our rule of law calls for a social commitment. Poverty and inequality have worsened as a result of terrorism. We are making progress with limited resources in applying the seven tools for equality: an educational revolution, expanded social protection, an economy based on the principle of solidarity, rural social management, management of public services,

building a country of owners and improving the quality of urban life.

As examples of this, we have created new capacity for 500,000 children in schools, but we still have 1.5 million children who do not have access to primary education. Microcredit has increased by 50 per cent, but we are still far from being a country of owners. The social task is arduous, but with our characteristic determination we will overcome every obstacle in order to build a just society.

Security is the most important human right of the poor, who need our policy to be successful so that there can be peace, confidence, investment, employment and equity.

Amidst tragedies, the Colombian democracy is vigorous. On 25 October, our citizens will decide whether to accept a referendum to defeat corruption and to strengthen social investment. And the following day the people will elect 30 governors from among 133 candidates; 914 mayors from among 3,441 candidates; 398 deputies from 373 lists composed of 2,723 candidates; approximately 9,000 municipal council members from 6,105 lists with 56,590 candidates; and local administrative boards from 3,156 lists with 13,387 candidates. Today, we live in a pluralistic and enthusiastic democracy, despite the challenge of terrorism.

It would be a tragedy if the civilized world does not unite its efforts once and for all to defeat terrorism and to support the democracies that are fighting against it. We need the unity of all democratic people in order to defeat terror.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Colombia for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Alvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mrs. Sandra Pierantozzi, Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau.

Mrs. Sandra Pierantozzi, Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming Her Excellency Mrs. Sandra Pierantozzi, Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau, and inviting her to address the General Assembly.

Mrs. Pierantozzi (Palau): I bring to the Assembly greetings and good wishes from the President of the Republic of Palau, Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., and from the people and the Government of the Republic of Palau.

Nearly 60 years ago, in his final inaugural address, United States President Franklin Delano Roosevelt reflected on the lessons of the first half of the twentieth century. He said:

> "We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away. ... We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community."

Those words have more resonance today than ever before as Palau and the rest of the world enter into the twenty-first century. The Republic of Palau is enjoying rapid development, which came with its independence on 1 October nine years ago. However, at a time of rapid globalization, when events halfway around the world — and most recently in our own backyard — can profoundly affect our safety and prosperity, Palau realizes that it must join the international community in this new challenge to protect our people at home and our way of life.

To that end, the Republic of Palau reaffirms its unwavering support for the war led by the United States against terrorism. We all benefit when nations

come together to deter aggression and terrorism, to resolve conflicts, to prevent the spread of diseases and the spread of dangerous weapons, to promote democracy and human rights, to open markets and to create economic and financial stability, to raise living standards and to protect the environment — to face those myriad challenges that no nation can meet alone.

Globalization, however, also brings about risks. Outlaw States and ethnic conflicts threaten regional stability and progress in many important areas of the world. Weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, drug trafficking and other international crimes are global concerns that transcend national borders. Other problems originating overseas — such as the depletion of resources, rapid population growth, environmental damage, new infectious diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), pervasive corruption and uncontrolled refugee migration — have increasingly significant implications for every nation's security. National economies will suffer if the global economy is unstable or if markets collapse, and the highest environmental standards — such as those set out in the Kyoto Protocol — will not protect small, struggling island countries like Palau if other countries do not join the global effort to bring about peace and stability.

Protection of the environment is a major concern to us. Decisions made today regarding the environment and natural resources can affect every nation's security for generations. Environmental threats do not respect national borders, but they can pose long-term dangers for every nation's security and well-being. Scarcity and depletion of natural resources can trigger and exacerbate conflict. Environmental threats — such as climate change, the depletion of stratospheric ozone, the introduction of nuisance plant and animal species, the overharvesting of fish and of other living natural resources, and the transnational movement of hazardous chemicals and waste — directly threaten the health and economic well-being of every people of the world. For Palau, the immediate danger is the rise in sea level.

Another issue that we wish to address is that of the cloning of human beings. We believe that any global and comprehensive ban on human cloning must include a ban on the cloning of human embryos for research purposes. While the goal of finding cures to chronic illnesses is laudable, progress and economic gain achieved by creating and destroying human life come at too high a price. We believe that adult-stem-cell research is a promising field of study that can provide an ethical source of stem cells for scientific investigation. The international community must not allow human life to be devalued in any way, and we encourage all States to adopt such measures as may be necessary to prohibit techniques of genetic engineering that may have adverse consequences on respect for human dignity.

In public health, we note that many peoples around the world are suffering and dying each day from the scourges of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, cancer, polio and similar diseases. Combined international support for public health beyond the clinic walls must be advocated and put into practice if we are to eliminate some of those challenges to quality human life.

Such international support and collaborative efforts were recently manifested during the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). I also urge all members of this body to support and ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control adopted by the World Health Assembly this year. More importantly, we should combine our efforts to implement the mission of the Convention to control tobacco use, which contributes to diseases and death throughout the world.

The United Nations is to truly represent all peoples, with discrimination and exclusion eliminated from its operational practice. To be effective at ensuring international peace and security, all nations, large and small, must be represented in the United Nations. The Republic of China on Taiwan can no longer be kept on the sidelines of the most important international Organization and the leading forum for international dialogue. Over the past half-century, the hard-working people of Taiwan have transformed their country into the world' s seventeenth largest economy and a vibrant democracy. In 1996, Taiwan had its first direct presidential election and, in 2000, accomplished its first peaceful transfer of executive powers. Since then Taiwan's popularly-elected Government has acted in accordance with United Nations resolutions to combat international terrorism and to support humanitarian relief in countries throughout the world, and yet it is still excluded from the process. Our experience with SARS has shown us tha' exclusion can bring no benefits to anyone. The 23 million Taiwanese people have an equal right to a voice in the United

Nations and should be welcomed by all members of this body.

The central purpose of the United Nations is the preservation and advancement of world peace. It accomplishes its peacemaking and humanitarian assistance efforts through international cooperation. Its 191 Member States, large and small, rich and poor, and with different political views, strive collectively to address global challenges and advance world peace. Together, they consider and decide on the world's most pressing problems. Thus, in this regard I ask the world here today, at the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, to study and discuss the roots of terrorism and possible solutions, including inter-religious intervention; to promote conservation standards to protect our Earth's environment; to promote world public health; to protect the human dignity by banning the cloning of human embryos; and to continue our quest for peace and security for all peoples of the world.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau for her statement.

Mrs. Sandra Pierantozzi, Vice-President and Minister of Health of the Republic of Palau, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Somsavat Lengsavad, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Lengsavad (Lao People's Democratic Republic): Let me convey my congratulations to Mr. Julian Hunte on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. We are confident that this Assembly stands to benefit greatly from his diplomatic experience and skills. Like others, I pledge the full support and cooperation of the Lao delegation to him as he undertakes his duties and express the hope that our deliberations on many of the most pressing world issues will be fruitful.

Since the last time we convened, the world has gone through major changes and challenges. Although peace, dialogue and cooperation for development continue to prevail today across many regions, we have been bearing witness to a world beset by terror, civil wars, armed conflicts and violence, acts of aggression and interference in the internal affairs of States. In handling these problems, we believe it is incumbent upon all of us to show patience, courage and determination and to strive to solve them through dialogue, diplomacy and political means. Towards that end, we should continue to seek multilateral routes through the United Nations. In this regard, we should like to make special mention of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. While we wish him more success as he endeavours to defend and promote the principles and ideals of this universal Organization, we can only express great appreciation for the efforts he has made.

At present, the problems plaguing our planet, alas, are not limited to those considered to be political or military. There are also those that affect the environmental, social and economic fronts. More striking are the issues of global warming, pollution, natural disasters, HIV/AIDS, incurable diseases, poverty and underdevelopment, the crises of refugees, debt and economic stagnation, which have yet to find effective solutions. The severity of these problems is even more acute in a globalized world in which the gap between developed and developing countries is widening.

We should therefore strive effectively to address these problems in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals adopted three years ago by this Assembly. Standing here today and recommitting ourselves to meeting those noble Goals, we want a world where poverty and hunger are alleviated; where education is offered to every child; where women have the same opportunities as men; where incurable diseases are effectively combated; and where the world continues to build partnership and cooperation for sustained economic growth and sustainable development.

For many years, the land-locked developing countries have attached a particular interest to their special needs and problems. As Chairman of the 31-member Group of Land-Locked Developing Countries for the past four years, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has spared no effort in bringing the special needs and problems of land-locked developing countries to the forefront of the international arena. As a result of this long-standing concerted effort, the International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries and Donor Countries and International Financial and Development

Institutions on Transit Transport Cooperation was held last month in Kazakhstan as the first-ever United Nations conference of its kind. The meeting adopted the Almaty Declaration and Programme of Action. We are delighted that this global Programme of Action addresses, first and foremost, the special needs and problems of the landlocked developing countries, while taking into account the legitimate concerns of transit developing countries. In this respect, all stakeholders are urged to fully and effectively implement the Almaty Programme of Action in the years to come.

Since its inception, the United Nations has performed multiple activities in various areas, such as the maintenance of peace and security, socio-economic development, humanitarian assistance, the promotion of international law, human rights and the protection of the environment. In these endeavours, the United Nations has achieved many successes, including in the field of socio-economic development. However, in many other areas, still more effort is required in order to attain better results.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in his annual report this year,

> "in the area of peace and security, it has been a trying year for the United Nations. The war in Iraq severely tested the principle of collective security and the resilience of the Organization." (*A/58/1, para. 2*)

In the light of this, and given the present international situation, the Security Council, the main body for the maintenance of international peace and security, should play its full role in securing peace and security in the world, as stipulated in the Charter. The Security Council members, especially the permanent members, should do everything possible to ensure that this organ effectively discharges its duties in the maintenance of peace and security. A safe and secure world would enable all nations to better promote their socio-economic development. The international community is therefore urged to deploy serious efforts towards this end.

In a world where cooperation for development is widespread, where in every region there is economic integration to achieve common benefits, it is regrettable that the economic, commercial and financial restrictions imposed on Cuba continue. We reaffirm the support of the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the General Assembly resolution calling for the lifting of such a restrictive policy, with the aim of benefiting all peoples in the region as well as the world at large.

With regard to the Middle East, we continue to be gravely concerned about the ongoing violence and disproportionate use of force that have brought nothing but destruction and death to both Palestine and Israel. We urge the two sides to exercise the utmost restraint and engage in earnest negotiations so that peace and cooperation may eventually ensue in the region. If that is done, by 2005 the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and viable State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security, could become a reality.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has followed the recent developments in the Korean peninsula with great attention. We render our full support to the six-party talks hosted in Beijing in August by the Government of China, which contributed actively. We are pleased with the significant progress achieved by this meeting. We very much hope that the dialogue process will be pursued to address the nuclear issue in parallel with the security of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. This would no doubt contribute to the realization of a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, the assurance of security for all countries in North-East Asia and the peaceful reunification of the two Koreas.

Over the past year, the Lao people of all ethnic groups have pursued their national development in unity and harmony. We are delighted that, through the promotion of the untapped potential of all domestic economic sectors and the expansion of cooperation with the international community, the pace of national economic growth has continuously increased; the livelihood of the people, particularly those in the rural areas, has been further improved; and, last but not least, political stability and social order have been ensured and strengthened.

In order to free the country from underdevelopment, apart from our domestic effort, we have attached great importance to the achievements made in our increased effort to implement the regional integration of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). We highly value the continued development of cooperation between ASEAN and the People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, India and other dialogue partners. Furthermore, we are pleased with the new chapter in the

strengthening of cooperation between ASEAN and the United States, in particular the signing of the bilateral trade agreement between the Governments of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the United States in Vientiane on 19 September this year. In this regard, I wish to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to friendly countries and international organizations for the invaluable assistance and support rendered to the cause of our national development.

As it enters this new century, humankind has a strong aspiration for peace and cooperation for development across the globe. In accordance with the Charter and international law, we should exert our collective efforts to build a better world. In this spirit, our delegation once again calls for cooperation and unity in designing and implementing action-oriented measures to tackle the challenges and problems plaguing our planet. If we do this, future generations will commend us for all our efforts in establishing conditions for their peaceful lives and prosperity.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jan Petersen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

Mr. Petersen (Norway): The brutal attacks on the United Nations Mission in Baghdad are beyond comprehension. I condemn them in the strongest possible terms. The perpetrators of such crimes must be brought to justice. We must renew our efforts to bolster respect for humanitarian principles. It is unacceptable that United Nations personnel are unable to conduct humanitarian relief operations without risking their lives. It is unacceptable that United Nations personnel are denied access to people in distress.

On behalf of the people of Norway, I wish to express my respect and admiration to all United Nations workers who are doing what they can to help in Iraq and other zones of conflict and danger.

Unless the security needs in Iraq are met, valuable time on the road to political stability, democracy and economic and social development will be lost. Without a safe and secure environment, the United Nations is unable to help Iraq along that road. I deplore the political assassinations of religious and political leaders in Iraq.

Now we must focus our attention on what is needed to rebuild Iraq. Norway is participating in international efforts to stabilize and rebuild Iraq for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Our aim is to help the people of Iraq regain control of their own destiny, to help them build a future of freedom and justice and a life in peace with their neighbours.

The United Nations should play a key role in setting the benchmarks and guiding the political process towards the early restoration of Iraq's sovereignty and the transfer of power to an Iraqi government. A carefully considered timeframe must be drawn up. We must also make sure that the tasks that we decide for the United Nations in Iraq are realistic and achievable.

Terrorism is a dark force, which targets the very values and norms upon which the United Nations Charter is based. An overwhelming majority of Member States have joined forces to fight it, and we have taken some important steps together. We need to strengthen the role of the United Nations in multilateral disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. We need to agree on strong and effective regimes that can provide reliable protection against weapons of mass destruction.

A week ago, world leaders and the Secretary-General sat down in New York at the invitation of Norway to discuss ways to fight terrorism and the roots of evil. They voiced their dedication to the fight against terrorism, and their determination to place humanity at the centre of that fight.

We want a United Nations that reaches out and responds to the concerns of all Member States. It must reach out and respond to the concerns of all individuals, to the needs of men and women alike. We need a world of equal opportunities, where all the world's human resources — and not only half of them — are fully put to use. We have a vision of a humane world where people can live in security and dignity, free from poverty and despair. To live up to the ideals enshrined in the Charter, the United Nations must continue to give priority to human rights and fundamental aspects of governance.

A culture of impunity for mass atrocities is incompatible with human dignity and undermines long-term security. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is a historic turning point.

Fighting terrorism, strengthening human security, working for development and preventing conflict are challenges that are closely related. In the Millennium

Development Goals, we have pledged to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and to reduce child mortality by two-thirds. We have pledged to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Norway currently holds the chairmanship of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and we are committed to achieving real progress. It is crucial that developing and developed countries and the private sector all contribute. Development must be built on a global partnership and on shared responsibilities. Norway remains committed to the Doha Development Agenda. We are confident that strengthening and making full use of this multilateral framework is the way to go. We will work hard to get the negotiations back on track.

More often than not, the United Nations only becomes engaged in earnest after armed conflict has broken out. The reasons are many, but they are no excuse for the loss of lives, the human misery and the setbacks in development that are too often the high price of collective inaction. Too often the main legacy of a civil war is another civil war. Yet there are many things we can do to prevent this from happening.

We can act to prevent economic conflict drivers such as diamonds and other natural resources, from fuelling and prolonging conflicts, and we can act to curb the illegal trade in small arms. By fighting poverty and promoting peace and development, we are making the soundest investment possible in Africa. We will assist the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) in their endeavours towards economic and social development and political stability in Africa.

Norway will continue working for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa. The peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea is entering a crucial phase. We urge both parties to stand by their commitments and not hesitate now that they stand at the threshold of lasting peace.

In the Sudan, important progress has just been made. We urge the parties to step up their efforts and reach a final settlement.

Over the last few years, the United Nations has made considerable progress in peacekeeping. The foundations for a new approach have been laid. Notable results have been achieved in Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste, as well as in reinforcing the capabilities of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and strengthening the United Nations Standby Arrangement System.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is facing a particularly challenging task. Two years on, much has been achieved, but the situation is still volatile. The safe and secure environment needed for economic growth and full implementation of the Bonn Agreement is not in place. Many people are suffering from food shortages, and are in need of assistance. Elections are due next year. Women are not yet properly empowered. Unless we can assure nation-wide security, the nation-building process in Afghanistan will be at risk. A sustained international presence will be necessary for the foreseeable future.

With NATO in command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Norway as a NATO member has an additional stake in the building of a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Afghanistan. We have decided to make Afghanistan one of our partner countries in development cooperation.

In Sri Lanka the peace process has reached a decisive juncture. We are hopeful that the parties will soon be able to embark on negotiations towards an interim administration for the North-East Province. It is vital that the parties reach agreement and resume direct peace negotiations within the timeframe envisaged.

Development of the economic infrastructure is equally important for all in Sri Lanka. In parallel with dealing with the political process, the parties should take care to proceed with the important task of reconstruction and development.

The President returned to the Chair.

Norway remains firmly committed to the role of facilitator of the peace process between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. We call on the international community to engage in the efforts for reconstruction and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka.

In Myanmar the Government has recently stated its intention to invite the democratic opposition and the ethnic minorities to take part in the building of a national consensus. A good way to start would be to release Aung San Suu Kyi immediately and without conditions and thereby demonstrate the Government's

sincere intentions. This might mean the beginning of a new political era in Myanmar. Norway stands ready to support efforts to make democratization an irreversible process. We strongly support the role of the United Nations and believe that the active involvement of countries in the region will be vital to reaching a solution.

The year 2003 has been a tragic one for Israelis and Palestinians. Their acceptance of the road map for peace boded well, but again violence and not politics is determining the course of development. A political solution is needed, building on a parallel process where Israel takes significant steps to end the occupation, and where the Palestinian Authority takes determined steps to fight terror. The ultimate goal, in which we will not lose faith, is that of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security.

Norway urges Israel to do its utmost to ease the living conditions of the Palestinians. In our capacity as chairman of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for assistance to the Palestinian people, Norway remains committed to rebuilding the Palestinian areas.

Norway also believes that the parties should avail themselves of the assistance of the international community and individual countries through appropriate monitoring mechanisms.

The past year has been a trying one for the United Nations. Multilateralism has come under pressure from those who continue to question the primacy of the United Nations and therefore look elsewhere for solutions.

The answer to this challenge is to make the United Nations more effective and thus more relevant in dealing with issues at the top of the international agenda. By increasing the relevance of the United Nations we can increase its authority and legitimacy. Norway shares the Secretary-General's view that Member States need to take a hard look at today's United Nations institutions and ask whether they are adequate for the tasks we have before us.

The time has come to advance the issue of reform of the Security Council. It is also time to agree on a more relevant agenda for the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Human Rights. Norway puts emphasis on reforming the work of the First Committee. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a high-level panel to recommend concrete ways in which to strengthen the functioning of the major bodies of the United Nations and the relationships between them. Norway, together with the Nordic countries, has a long-standing commitment to reform. We stand ready to assist in bringing the initiatives of the Secretary-General to fruition.

The aims and ideals of the United Nations are as relevant as ever — to maintain peace and security, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, to establish conditions for justice and the international rule of law and to promote economic and social development.

The world has changed since 1945, but the United Nations has not changed with it. I urge Member States to come together with a renewed sense of unity and purpose, so that we can change our Organization in the collective spirit that lies at the core of the Charter.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay and former President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Opertti (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay believes in the United Nations, has faith in the United Nations, will support the Organization and will continue to contribute to it, as it has been doing since it became one of its founding Members. It is comforting to note that, at this time of crisis for the Organization, virtually all the participants in this debate have expressed this same sentiment.

Some six decades ago, the United Nations was created to promote and regulate multilateral cooperation, by which the international community agreed to address and resolve common problems. The structure of the Organization, the functioning of its organs, and the rights and obligations of its Members, as formulated in the San Francisco Charter, all reflected the international political reality of that time.

But, over the course of more than half a century, there have been profound changes in the structure of international society. Its actors have multiplied and become more diverse and there have been new and more dangerous manifestations of violence. New threats to peace that were not foreseen by the drafters of the Charter occur with increasing frequency. At the same time, there has been an intensification of certain growing trends that seriously affect the well-being of humanity, such as the degradation of the environment,

the depletion of natural resources, epidemics and the contrast between consumer societies and societies that live in extreme poverty.

In recent years, and in particular during this general debate, special emphasis has been placed on the need to reform and revitalize the United Nations in order to adapt it to current realities. Uruguay shares this position, not only because it considers that this Organization has not been completely effective in its handling of some recent crises, but because it understands that the scale of the changes in the world today justifies the search for ways of adapting the institution.

Although it is true that the system of collective security established by the San Francisco Charter has not always been able to respond to crises effectively, in numerous cases multilateral action by the United Nations has succeeded in restoring peace in many regions and countries, contributed to the consolidation of democracy, and accelerated the reconstruction of affected countries. There are many more cases in which the Organization, through its various organs, has exercised positive and decisive control over crises and conflicts, thus preventing the situation from becoming worse and ensuring a peaceful solution.

The process of reform, which is indispensable and cannot be delayed, should in our view be based on the following premises.

The first is to preserve intact the purposes and principles of the Organization, as enshrined in the Charter of San Francisco. After all, if we all gather here every year as the United Nations, it is because our nations are united around the values and ideals enshrined in the Charter and shared by all mankind, whose permanent and universal validity transcends the vicissitudes and accidents of history.

The second premise is that the reform process should be aimed principally at strengthening multilateral action, because never before has the need to cooperate and act together to deal with international problems been so great. Common global responses are needed to the proliferation and diversification of international actors; the fact that the world is getting smaller and more and more interdependent, due to the increase in trade and the extraordinary development of information and communication technologies; and above all the globalization of threats to peace, security and the well-being of our peoples. To use the words employed by the Secretary-General in this Assembly two weeks ago, Uruguay believes in "collective answers to our common problems and challenges" (A/58/PV.7).

Two years ago, the international community, through the United Nations organs, offered a fine example of solidarity by taking effective multilateral action in reaction to international terrorism, which threatens Governments, peoples, ideologies, religions and above all human reason, imbued with such elementary values as tolerance, compassion, solidarity and respect for human rights.

The attack on the headquarters of the United Nations in Baghdad — for which we wish again to express our most sincere condolences to the Secretary-General — is but another example of the barbarity and fanaticism that we can successfully fight only if we work together. With this attack, terrorism has given us a raw example of its destructive universality. The deaths of Special Representative Sergio Vieira de Mello and of other colleagues is emblematic of the tragedy suffered.

Just as in the fight against poverty, terrorism cannot be defeated as a conventional enemy would be with a victorious battle. The eradication of terrorism is an ongoing objective whose achievement requires time, patience and perseverance. Only through a joint approach and multilateral action directed above all at the roots of terrorism — not only at its atrocious manifestations — will it be possible to reduce and hopefully to eliminate this perverse and ubiquitous enemy and at the very least ensure its total rejection.

Uruguay, which is party to most international anti-terrorism instruments, attaches priority to the conclusion of a general convention against international terrorism. In this respect, we wish to express our satisfaction to the Secretary-General for having chosen transnational organized crime and terrorism as an item in the signing and accession ceremony for treaties promoted by the Organization on the occasion of this general debate.

The third premise to which my country subscribes is that we must not forget that the United Nations has for years now been engaged in a process of self-criticism and self-reform based on the idea that strengthening an institution means strengthening its organs. Reforms are being implemented in three of the main organs of the Organization. The modalities of

each one of the respective processes differ. In the Security Council, we are pursuing reform of its membership to make it more representative and to strengthen its democratic character. In the General Assembly, we are pursuing its revitalization so that its decisions can regain the authority they had in the past. In the Secretariat, the purpose of change is to enhance its effectiveness, an objective towards which the Secretary-General is working strenuously. These three processes are closely linked to each other but, despite this close link, we believe that they must continue to be pursued, as is now being done, separately, each one in its respective forum.

For Uruguay, one of the most important aspects of these reforms is the strengthening of the General Assembly, over which you, Sir, are presiding with such dignity and whose decisions are the most genuine manifestations of the will of the international community. Recent reforms are aimed at making this organ more effective, but more profound changes are required in order to restore the authority which the Charter grants it and which the Assembly has exerted in the past. We believe that there is still a great deal of room for reform. Obsolete structures and procedures remain. We also need to re-examine and evaluate the organization, conduct and outcome of the annual session that brings us all here together every year, including the idea of concentrating the negotiation of dozens of resolutions into a few weeks. Uruguay will support far-reaching measures to revitalize the Assembly. A better relationship between the different organs is no doubt another of the necessary areas for reform.

The fourth and final premise is that the efforts to reform our institutions must be complemented by equally vigorous efforts to change our own conduct as Members of the United Nations. When we agreed to become Members of this Organization, we freely agreed to fulfil in good faith the international obligations arising from the numerous treaties, conventions and other instruments that have resulted from the comprehensive legislative work accomplished by this Assembly, United Nations agencies and other international organizations and conferences.

However, the provisions of many of these instruments are not being implemented. At times, in a misguided defence of sovereignty, common expectations are thwarted in order to satisfy national interests that frequently are not of decisive importance. Protection of the environment and the law of the sea are good, but not the only examples of areas in which a sharp contrast can be seen between the extensive legislation that exists and the degree of implementation. Consequently, year after year, the competent international agencies and organizations and scientific authorities report the ongoing deterioration of the general environment, the abusive exploitation of natural resources, pollution of the seas and reduction or extinction of marine species.

The question of the fulfilment of obligations assumed is the weak link in the chain of multilateralism. We must seek ways of ensuring respect for international obligations. Over the long term, the satisfaction of common interests is the best way of satisfying the national interest.

Without prejudice to this profession of faith in the United Nations, Uruguay, a country of Latin America, is actively participating in the Organization of American States and in the inter-American system in general. Uruguay is also fully committed to regional integration processes, in particular to the Common Market of the South. We see in these mechanisms a promising avenue to help overcome the difficulties that result from our status as a developing country emerging from the most serious economic crisis of its history and trying to overcome the obstacles preventing it from achieving insertion into the global economy, such as, for example, the huge subsidies that the industrialized countries grant to their agricultural producers.

In this connection, finally, we cannot but mention the recent ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization, held in Cancún, whose lack of progress, in our opinion, is a negative signal to a world that is demanding fairer and more balanced rules, especially for countries such as Uruguay, whose economies rely primarily on the production of agricultural goods. We are hopeful that renewed impetus in the negotiations will permit us to achieve positive results in the coming weeks and months in Geneva, to the benefit of the less developed countries and the very future of international trade.

I close my statement conveying my country's satisfaction and pride in seeing you, Sir, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, a friendly country of our region, presiding over this Assembly. I wish you every success in your work.

The President: I now give the floor to His Royal Highness Prince Mohamed Bolkiah, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brunei Darussalam.

Prince Mohamed Bolkiah (Brunei Darussalam): My congratulations go to you, Sir, and to the people of Saint Lucia on your election, together with my thanks to your predecessor, Mr. Kavan, for his work over the past year. You have our full support and best wishes in all your efforts to promote the interests of the members of this Assembly.

May I couple these greetings with my great appreciation to our Secretary-General and his staff. We are very grateful indeed for their dedication and service during one of the most difficult years in United Nations history.

In particular, I wish to add once more the deepest sympathy of the Government and people of Brunei Darussalam to the families of Sergio Vieira de Mello and of all who lost loved ones, colleagues and friends in the attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. His Excellency and his staff were our public servants, our representatives and our people. The attack on them was an attack on us all. As such, we condemn it and all other acts of terrorism.

When Brunei Darussalam had the honour of becoming a Member of this Organization, we committed ourselves to two principles. The first was nationhood and all that this implies in terms of the rule of international law and the procedures that govern the affairs of this Assembly. The second was multilateral decision-making and, in turn, all that this also implies — respect for fellow members, sensitivity to their deep concerns and the need for dialogue and consultation as equal partners in the conduct of international affairs, no matter how long and how frustrating the process involved may be.

We continue to maintain our belief in these principles in spite of many disappointments in the past year, both here in the United Nations and earlier this month at the World Trade Organization. We feel that they are the only basis upon which international affairs can be conducted fairly. They apply to all the great political and economic organizations of which we are members and we especially look to the United Nations to uphold them.

By this token, the United Nations is whatever we ourselves make it. We form the largest coalition in history and we share responsibility for its successes and its failures. Among those is our failure to bring in the changes that are necessary if we are to evolve with the times in which we live.

Since 1992, this Assembly has been debating reform. It has the support of a large majority here, including all members of the Non-Aligned Movement. The results of our failure to build on this support can now be clearly seen. Our Security Council has been gravely divided and the past year has left a legacy of bitterness. The consequences for the ordinary people we represent — the people of developing nations year after year, the people of Iraq for the past 10 years or more, and the citizens of Palestine for over half a century — have been ever more disastrous.

In all this time, Members have been well aware that decision-making at the United Nations needs to be more inclusive and genuinely multilateral. On many occasions, they have expressed the desire that the Organization reflect today's world rather than the world of half a century ago. They wish to feel truly part of the decisions it makes.

As it operates now, however, many observers feel that the actual Members of this Organization are too weak to act effectively in solving the great affairs of the day. It is claimed that international affairs are now beyond the control of individual nations. They are global — global finance; global economics; global development; global poverty; global crime; and, of course, global terrorism. Consequently, some voices declare that an Assembly of individual nations, many of them small and still developing, has no power to address such matters.

That is a depressing scenario and, of course, none of us here really wants to believe it, but it does have one merit. It forces us to examine what the United Nations can actually do most effectively and what it can realistically achieve. The reply from too many of our people today would be, we fear: not much. This presents a powerful case for reform.

I therefore feel that we must frankly acknowledge our part in the feelings of hopelessness and frustration that are being voiced by ordinary people and indeed by many Governments. At present, restoring belief in the United Nations ability to act on their behalf may be our most important immediate task. On the one hand, the great world institutions are technically multilateral. They are run by the Governments of the world. Yet, in

fact, many of these Governments feel excluded from the most important decisions. Many interested parties feel that they are also on the outside.

Multilateralism, in other words, appears to have its limits. Beyond them, it seems, the stronger nations take over. This basic division, we hope, can be brought to an end. That is why we were so pleased to hear our Secretary-General emphasize the need for reform in his address last week. We congratulate the Secretary-General on the structural reforms he has overseen. We also thank him for the many times he has kept us in touch with his thinking and that of his staff and we thank him for the hopes he has continued to express about the future of our world Organization.

We still share his optimism. Nevertheless, that feeling can be maintained only if agreement on reform of the whole United Nations system is a real possibility. We accept that the task of bringing about this kind of overall change is extremely hard. The reports of your own Working Group, Mr. President, show a difficult pattern emerging over the past 10 years. There are more and more proposals and basic approaches continually diverge. Even though we largely share the same objectives, we remain divided on the means to achieve them.

The divisions we have seen this year, however, suggest that we cannot keep postponing change. They offer a test of whether the United Nations is indeed capable of evolving. That test must be passed, so we continue to support work on Security Council reform and offer our strong encouragement to the Secretary-General in the proposals he outlined last week.

In the face of today's problems, the United Nations must continue to offer powerful reasons for optimism about the future. We believe that this calls for a determined and united effort to address the root causes of the anger of all who feel unjustly treated. To do this, the United Nations as a whole must be a genuine partnership between nations. It must stand for shared idealism and a shared sense of human justice. That is what no other body can do.

That is what the work of Sergio Vieira de Mello and his colleagues was dedicated to. In their memory, and in that of all who have given their lives to this Organization, we all need to do a lot better at working together than we have over the past year.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Godfrey Smith, Attorney-General and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Belize.

Mr. Smith (Belize): My delegation celebrates the wisdom of the United Nations in choosing one of our distinguished Caribbean statesmen, Mr. Julian Hunte, to preside over this fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I assure you, Sir, that the energy and industry that you will bring to our work will produce very meaningful results in this very important session.

We continue to be fortunate to have the guidance and strength of our Secretary-General, whose skill and compassion are especially needed today. His words last Tuesday echoed strong and true, and we should all take heed.

And speaking of all, we need to respect the principle of universality of our Organization. The time has come to admit Taiwan to membership of the United Nations. Taiwan has proven itself to be an exemplary member of the international community with a deep sense of solidarity with small and poor nations.

Belize's Prime Minister has said:

> "When we turn our attention to the international stage there is greater cause for anxiety. Let us ask ourselves: After all the developments in building the international system and crystallizing international law from 1945 to the present, which of the following fundamental principles are respected in practice or indeed safe in theory: the peaceful settlement of disputes; the right to self-determination, sovereignty and territorial integrity; non-interference in the internal affairs of States; the right of peoples to have the social and political system of their choice; respect for social, economic and political human rights; not to use force or the threat of force to settle disputes; respect for the international rule of law; abiding by the Charter of the United Nations; and working towards a world governance based on multilateralism and the rule of reason, rather than of force?
>
> "Which of those is safe? Indeed, in the international arena ... we do seem to be in free fall towards barbarism".

Barbarism may not be new, but there does seem to be a greater tolerance for it and we do seem to be

more powerless to contain it. In a world riddled with fear and dominated by terrorism, including State terrorism, we need to concentrate on what needs to be done to save our humanity.

Mr. Rakhmonov (Tajikistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

As we contemplate the international arena, with multilateralism under threat and the development of peoples blocked by the practices of the rich and powerful, we can take comfort in one thing — that, yes, in the end ideas are more powerful than arms. And our ideas — we the United Nations of the world — are clearly and powerfully set out in our Charter. Yes, the Charter needs reform; we need urgently to democratize our practice. Small States make up the majority of our membership and elementary democracy demands that we have a greater say than our Charter presently allows us, but the basic principles of the Charter remain valid. The fundamentals are in place.

Article 1 of the Charter states the fundamental purpose of the United Nations: To maintain international peace and security, and to that end to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace. Article 24 of the Charter confers on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Under Article 42, should the Security Council consider that measures short of the use of force would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action must, of course, be agreed collective action, not unilateral action.

I ask members of the Assembly: Is there any part of that we do not understand? It seems perfectly simple and clear to us small States, which depend on the United Nations Charter and on respect for international principles and international law for our very existence. We are confronted with the question: Are we as an Organization irrelevant? And I say: only if we make ourselves irrelevant. And we do that only if we are determined to self-destruct.

We can call here for many lofty objectives, as contained in our Millennium Development Goals. We can pronounce on the many injustices facing so many peoples and countries in the present world dispensation, but all of that would be futile if our very United Nations should cease to be effective or become irrelevant. That is why I have restricted my statement to one plea to nations large and small, powerful or weak: Keep the United Nations alive, respect its Charter, abide by agreed international principles and international law. That is all we ask, nothing more. Above all, let us not give up what it has cost us so much time and effort, so much blood, to bring to a modest but important stage — our multilateral system.

All civilized nations would surely agree to this plea rather than plunge the world into barbarism. Multilateralism or chaos. Long Live the United Nations!

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Surakiart Sathirathai, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Mr Sathirathai (Thailand): At the outset, I would like to join the international community in paying tribute to the late Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, all United Nations personnel who lost their lives and those wounded by the terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. We strongly condemn that cowardly terrorist attack and reaffirm our commitment to supporting the United Nations in paving the way for the stability, security and sovereignty of Iraq.

On behalf of the Government and people of Thailand, I wish to extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. Julian Hunte of Saint Lucia upon his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session. I am confident that, under his wise and exemplary leadership, this session, held at such a difficult time, will lead to a fruitful conclusion. I also wish to take this opportunity to commend his predecessor, Mr. Jan Kavan, whose tireless efforts have steered the United Nations along a constructive path during a year of difficult challenges.

This session meets at a most critical juncture or, as the Secretary-General put it in his address: "We have come to a fork in the road" (A/58/PV.7). This road was meant to build a multilateral system to ensure a better world for the human race. It is at this critical juncture that the threats and challenges to multilateralism of the past 12 months have underscored, more than ever, that in order to collectively confront these threats and challenges to global peace, security and prosperity, the

world cannot do without multilateralism. But, as echoed by many from this rostrum, the big question is: how?

As the foremost multilateral institution, the United Nations needs to carry out its mission in the context of these realities. The Secretary-General has expounded his far-sighted initiative for the proposed reforms of the institutions and the establishment of a high-level panel of eminent personalities. Thailand lends its support to the Secretary-General's noble endeavour and hopes that, during the next session, he will come up with a proposal that will take us on the right path.

Many different views, agreements and disagreements have been expressed in this Hall in this general debate. This illustrates that the international community must learn to live with and be tolerant of differences. We may differ in culture, religion and values, but our differences and diversities must not become the sources of hostility. They must be a source of our combined strength to enhance partnership and multilateralism. We believe that the promotion of true partnership and human security will help the United Nations mission in fulfilling its noble goals.

From Timor-Leste to Sierra Leone and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community can be proud of forging partnership in peacekeeping operations under the framework of the United Nations. Thailand is proud to be one of the 89 countries participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations and wishes to reiterate its commitment to continuing this partnership wherever and whenever needed through its participation in the United Nations standby arrangements system. For its part, Thailand remains firmly committed to supporting United Nations reconstruction and peace-building efforts, as we have done in the past in Timor-Leste and Afghanistan. Thailand has already contributed $250,000 to Iraq through the International Committee of the Red Cross and is committed to providing another $500,000 for dried halal food. Military construction engineers and medical personnel are also being dispatched to Iraq to provide further humanitarian assistance. We hope that peace can eventually reign in the region.

No one deserves peace, stability and a prosperous future more than the peoples of the Middle East. Far too long have the people of that region suffered from violence, acts of terror and despair. We call upon the international community to come together in addressing this problem. All sides must seize the opportunity to embark on the road towards a just and comprehensive peace so that the people of Israel and the people of Palestine can at last live in peace, security and harmony.

Terrorism spares no one, strong or weak, rich or poor. To succeed against terrorism, there is no other way but to be united. The Government of Thailand has worked very closely with the international community to rid the world of this scourge. Domestic legislation has been amended in order to enable Thailand to cope with terrorist activities and to suppress the financing of terrorism more effectively. We take no second chances in our fight against international terrorism.

As freedom from fear and freedom from want are the two major components of human security, it is clear that human security cannot be achieved simply because a country wants to do it all alone. Rather, human security is achieved because all countries decide to do it all together. It is achieved because countries are willing to forge a partnership out of their differences to build strength for human security.

That is why Thailand considers its membership of the Human Security Network an important partnership strength, complementary to the core values of the United Nations for the promotion of peace and security, economic and social development, human rights, humanitarian affairs and international law. Only two weeks ago, Thailand was proud and honoured to have hosted the Fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. It was the first time this Meeting has come to Asia, where land mines are a threat to the security of hundreds of millions of people. Throughout our presidency of the Convention until the first review conference in November 2004, Thailand will do its utmost to ensure much further achievements and considerable progress in the core objectives of the Convention: mine clearance, victim assistance, stockpile destruction and universal acceptance of the Convention.

Across the continent, as one of only three Asian partners for cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Thailand seeks to build bridges between Asia, especially the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and Europe. We believe

that not despite our differences in cultural and social values, but because of those differences, Asia and Europe will learn the art of living together, creating a world of human security.

Narcotic drugs and pandemics transcend all borders and become as much of a threat to human security as terrorism. Like terrorism, decisive and resolute partnership actions at all levels are required to tackle these global problems to achieve sustainable development.

The Thai Government has declared war against narcotic drugs since taking office in February 2001. This year, we made it the peak of our campaign. Our battle against the scourge of drug production and trafficking, especially methamphetamines, must be all but comprehensive. Within the permit of the law, we have mounted an integrated strategic campaign, incorporating prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, and suppression. We hope to be able to declare a total victory by the end of the year.

We have forged a more effective partnership with our neighbours and beyond to overcome this global scourge once and for all. This past June, Thailand hosted a five-nation meeting comprising Thailand, China, India, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to discuss combating transnational crimes, including the issue of drug trafficking. Furthermore, Thailand is also forging partnership at the global level by working hand in hand with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as a partner with shared responsibility to counter drugs and crime in the global context.

Just as drugs tear at the social fabric of societies, diseases such as HIV/AIDS cripple human resources across the globe. Thailand commends the convening of the high-level plenary on HIV/AIDS on 22 September. We support the ongoing efforts undertaken within the framework of the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. We also remain steadfast in our partnerships with neighbouring countries, particularly the Greater Mekong subregion, as well as with related United Nations agencies, to help tackle the global challenge posed by HIV/AIDS. As host of the Fifteenth International AIDS Conference in July 2004, we look forward to high-level representation of the world community to share the experiences, as well as to forging strong partnerships and cooperation to build a united global front to deal with this pandemic.

With regard to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) — the disease that crippled many countries and affected the tourist industry so badly throughout the world this year — we found that only the prompt response and commitment of ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) partnership enabled us to keep the pandemic under control and quell the panic and fear, which were worse than the disease itself.

The non-traditional security threats of HIV/AIDS, SARS and narcotic drugs — "soft threats", in the words of the Secretary-General — demonstrate once again that no matter what differences each country or region may have, international cooperation and partnership are crucial in order to combat both traditional and non-traditional challenges to human security.

Guided by the principle of deriving partnership strength from diversity, Thailand has embarked on various initiatives to bridge socio-economic disparities at the regional and subregional levels with a view to enhancing peace and prosperity. The Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), which is only in its second year of existence but already comprises 22 Asian countries, representing East, West, South, North and Central Asia, is a prime example. Within one year of its inception, the ACD had achieved considerable progress with regard to various cooperation programmes, even in the area of financial cooperation. The second ACD Ministerial Meeting in June this year adopted the Chiang Mai Declaration on Asian Bond Market Development. The Asian bond market has been heralded as the new financial architecture for the "world of differences".

Thailand continues to work for partnership based on diversity and difference so as to promote socio-economic development among nations. Given the economic disparity among our immediate neighbours, the economic cooperation strategy initiated by the Prime Minister, Mr. Thaksin Shinawatra, is the most recent partnership aimed at narrowing the economic gap between Thailand, Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, with a view to generating employment and income based on comparative advantage and mutual benefits. It will complement other bilateral and regional cooperative frameworks, and serve as a building block towards advancing ASEAN economic integration.

Thailand has chosen the theme, "A World of Differences: Partnership for the Future", for the 2003 meeting of the economic leaders of APEC, scheduled to take place in Thailand in October. The convening of that APEC leaders' meeting reflects the belief that, despite the diversity and differences that exist throughout the region, there is unlimited benefit and potential that can be tapped through effective partnership. The meeting will discuss five sub-themes: a knowledge-based economy; the promotion of human security; financial architecture for a world of differences; small and medium enterprises; and action on development pledges. In addition, we will focus on the issue of counter-terrorism with a view to promoting economic stability in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. The choice of those sub-themes shows that, despite the differences among APEC economies, partnerships on those issues can be forged for the benefit of the region and of the world.

Last year, at the fifty-seventh session, I gave a comprehensive account of Thailand's dual-track strategy to attain steady economic growth with social equity. Before concluding, I would like this morning to report to the Assembly on the success of our efforts to create economic and social partnership. That success is the result of combining the diverse strengths of both the grass-roots economy and the export-led business sector as engines of growth. We are confident that our economy rests on a secure and firm foundation that will lead us along the path of economic growth and sustainable development.

Last year, the Thai economy registered a 5.3 per cent growth in gross domestic product, which was followed by 6.7 percent growth in the first quarter of this year. That is our best economic performance since the 1997 crisis. On 31 July, Thailand paid back all of its International Monetary Fund loans in full — two years ahead of schedule. The Government is committed to the eradication of poverty, as defined by the United Nations, by the year 2009. By placing human security at the forefront of the Government's policies, Thailand is stressing its determination to ensure for the Thai people a society free from want and free from fear.

Living in a world of differences will entail misery if we keep forging conflict out of diversity. It will entail hardship if we keep exacerbating disagreement. It will entail stagnation if we keep failing to make room for compromise. It will entail human suffering if Governments keep turning their backs on chances of partnership. And it will entail devastation if we use our differences as an excuse to always differ.

But we, Members of the United Nations, live in a world of differences. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that our world of differences has a future — a future that will not entail misery, hardship and human suffering as a result of those differences. It is incumbent upon every one of us to work with United Nations institutions so as to ensure that our differences are turned into a source of strength for our future. Thailand is doing its part, and will continue to do so, for such a future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Choe Su Hon, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Choe Su Hon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text provided by the delegation*): I would like at the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, to congratulate Mr. Julian Hunte, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session.

I would also like to express appreciation for the efforts made by the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, to strengthen the functions and role of the United Nations, as required under current circumstances.

The political situation today is more unstable than ever. We are confronted by new challenges as we try to make this century one of peace and prosperity for humankind. Countries have been designated, on the basis of extreme national chauvinism and hostility, as part of an axis of evil and as targets of pre-emptive nuclear attacks. Unilateral military attacks are being openly perpetrated against sovereign States under the pretext of the war against terrorism and on the basis of suspicions that they possess weapons of mass destruction.

The principles of respect for sovereignty and sovereign equality are being violated, and international relations plunged into increasingly severe confrontation and antagonism, because of neo-imperialist practices that are based on the supremacy of power.

As we are well aware, this situation is a product of unilateralism, which is compelling countries to be subservient to the high-handedness and unreasonable demands of the super-Power. My delegation is of the view that the pressing common task before States Members of the United Nations is to reject unilateralism and build a new world in which all countries, large and small, coexist peacefully.

I would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the principled position and sincere efforts of the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to ensure a fair solution to the nuclear issue between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, which is now the focus of attention of the international community. I believe that it will be a positive contribution to the work of the current General Assembly.

The nuclear issue is, in its essence, an outcome of the hostile policy pursued by the United States to isolate and stifle the Democratic People's Republic of Korea politically, economically and militarily. It originated from this deep-rooted hostility, which denies our system and refuses to co-exist with my country.

My country's consistent position is to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully through dialogue and negotiations. Denuclearizing the Korean peninsula is the ultimate goal, the initiative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the earnest aspiration of the entire Korean nation.

Accordingly, at both tripartite and six-party talks on the nuclear issue, my country advanced proposals aimed at achieving the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. The announcement of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — United States Joint Statement of 11 June 1993, the adoption of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea — United States Agreed Framework on 21 October 1994 and the subsequent process of their implementation have clearly testified to our peace-loving stand and its justness.

The Korean people as well as the entire world welcomed the historic inter-Korean summit meeting in June 2000 and its resultant adoption of the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration. They also sincerely hoped that these developments would lead to peace and stability in the region.

However, the welcome atmosphere and the expectations for peace and stability, raised for a while, suddenly disappeared, and one party has resumed acute confrontation. My country has been singled out as part of an axis of evil and the target of pre-emptive nuclear attack. That was then adopted as a policy and put into action. In particular, following the visit by the United States presidential envoy to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in October 2002, the United States reversed black and white, alleging that my country had admitted to have a secret nuclear weapons programme. It also proceeded to unilaterally halt the supply of heavy fuel oil from November 2002 in violation of the Agreed Framework, and eventually it nullified all the bilateral agreements.

The United States even put pressure upon my country to give up its nuclear programme and accept nuclear inspection with the aim of disarming the country, while openly attempting to overthrow the Government by force. The peace now maintained on the Korean peninsula is entirely thanks to the powerful deterrence to war, which has been built up by our policy of independence, the songun policy. Our deterrence policy is not intended to attack anyone, but to serve as a means of self-defence to safeguard our sovereignty in all intents and purposes.

In order to resolve the nuclear issue peacefully through dialogue, the hostile policy towards my country should be changed fundamentally. That is the key to the solution of the nuclear issue. At the six-party talks in Beijing in late August, my country set as a goal the abandonment by the United States of its hostile policy towards us in exchange for renunciation of our nuclear programme. To achieve that goal, we proposed to take all necessary measures through a package deal and to work towards the implementation of these measures on a step-by-step basis, following the principle of simultaneous action.

Our proposal contains a detailed account of the package deal and the order of simultaneous action for a comprehensive and fair solution of the nuclear issue, including abandonment of the hostile policy towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the conclusion of the non-aggression treaty between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States, renunciation of the nuclear programme and normalization of bilateral relations.

Simultaneous action is a realistic way to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, and any opposition to it is tantamount to rejecting denuclearization. Other States participating in the Beijing talks also demanded a package solution and simultaneous action, urging a peaceful settlement to the nuclear issue. However, the United States alone repeated its unilateral call for my country's abandonment of nuclear weapons programme first, with no reference to the change of its hostile policy which is the key to the solution of the nuclear issue. The United States even behaved imprudently, asserting that a non-aggression treaty is neither appropriate nor necessary and that it is not interested in such a treaty.

The United States went so far as to insist that if bilateral relations are to be normalized even after my country scraps its nuclear programme, a full range of other issues such as missiles, conventional weapons and human rights should be addressed. In a word, the position of the United States is that it will discuss the steps that it will take only after we have taken every action. Under the present circumstances, in which my country and the United States are levelling guns at each other, asking the other party to put down their guns first does not make any sense. This demand can only be construed as having the ulterior motive of disarming and eliminating my country.

The result of the six-party talks has convinced us once again that the United States is seeking to disarm us by means of pressure and that it is still pursuing the hostile policy of stifling our country. Since it has been proven that the United States is only interested in turning the six-party talks into a ground for completely disarming and eliminating my country by all means, instead of co-existing peacefully with us, we have been compelled not to maintain any interest in or expectations for such talks.

As clearly stated, we have never made any promises with regard to the next round of the six-party talks. All developments concerning the nuclear issue prove well that pressure can never be a means for settlement of the nuclear issue and multiparty talks can be fruitful only when there is commitment to the abandonment of the hostile policy towards my country. Our demand is modest and simple. We just want both sides to drop their guns simultaneously and co-exist peacefully.

Having reaffirmed the position of my Government, which I believe is the most reasonable and just in addressing the nuclear issue, I hope that the President and the United Nations Member States have a correct understanding of our position and actively cooperate for a fair solution of the nuclear issue and for peace on the Korean peninsula and in the region as a whole.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains steadfast in its policy and determination to realize peace and the reunification of Korea and thus contribute to peace and security in the region and in the rest of the world. Thanks to the ideas of national independence and great national unity of the great leader General Kim Jong Il, the inter-Korean summit meeting was held in Pyongyang for the first time since the national division and the North-South Joint Declaration was made public on 15 June 2000. That marked a turning point in accelerating national reunification through the concerted efforts of the entire Korean nation. Despite ups and downs in recent years, there are active efforts to realize independent and peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula under the banner of the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration.

This year alone, a series of North-South ministerial-level talks were held and a groundbreaking ceremony to re-link interrupted railways and roads took place. Reunions of separated families and relatives took place, and various economic exchanges are now under way.

On 15 August, independence day, a splendid national meeting for peace and reunification was held in Pyongyang that demonstrated once again the aspirations and determination of all Korean nationals in the North, the South and overseas for reunification.

The Government and people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will achieve national reconciliation, unity and reunification and contribute to security in the region and the rest of the world by fully implementing the 15 June North-South Joint Declaration, upholding the great idea of the respected General Secretary Kim Jong Il.

An important task before Member States at present is to establish a just and equitable international order and relations, in keeping with the aspirations and desire of all humankind.

To that end, it is important, among others things, to ensure that the principle of respect for sovereignty and equality is fully observed in international relations. Unilateralism and high-handedness should be totally rejected and opposed, as they contravene the Charter and principles of international law.

In order to establish just international relations, the functions and the role of the United Nations must be enhanced and democratized. Democratizing the United Nations means decisively enhancing the authority of the General Assembly and reforming the Security Council.

The General Assembly should be empowered to review resolutions of the Security Council on such issues as sanctions and the use of force directly affecting international peace and security and to submit its relevant recommendations.

Regarding Security Council reform, we believe that priority should be given to ensuring full representation of the non-aligned and other developing countries that constitute an overwhelming majority of the United Nations membership.

Our people graciously celebrated the fifty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on 9 September, thus demonstrating the dignity and the might of the Kim Il Sung nation, firmly united single-heartedly around the great leader General Secretary Kim Jong Il.

The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue, on the basis of independence, peace and friendship — the fundamental ideals of its foreign policy — to contribute actively to international efforts for a just, equitable and new world order by further intensifying cooperation with all Member States.

The Acting President (*spoke in Russian*): We have heard the last speaker inscribed on the list for the general debate for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.